

Homefront Pioneers—Settling in “Clusters That Are the Focus of Systematic Attention”

In discussing the various approaches needed “to meet the ambitious goal of establishing 1,500 ... intensive programs [of growth],” the Universal House of Justice in its message dated 27 December 2005 states that “equally important will be the support lent to a cluster through an influx of pioneers.” Further, the message makes clear where pioneers, short- and long-term, are to be deployed and how they are to be utilized. The House of Justice explains that pioneers are to be “strategically placed” in clusters where their service will be “a means of reinforcing endeavors to lay the groundwork for accelerated growth or stabilizing cycles of activity under way.” As with every activity that is undertaken to advance the movement of clusters, pioneering is an element to be integrated into the framework for action.

During the last Five Year Plan, the House of Justice indicated that pioneers “experienced in institute programs” would be able to work with the local friends to advance the process of growth in their area. Such experience would be fundamental to a pioneer’s efforts “to support the work at the grass roots.” Along with this, many friends have now gained skills and insights related to the core activities, home visits, and teaching campaigns, making them better able to stimulate or reinforce the dynamics needed to move a cluster toward an intensive program of growth. With the guidance of the institutions, so that they are placed strategically in goal areas, dedicated pioneers who are experienced with the framework of the Plan can lend the process of entry by troops “an impetus that should not be underestimated.”

The following stories illustrate the positive results flowing from the consecrated efforts of homefront pioneers who have arisen to help fulfill the goals in their countries. This issue shares only the early learning in this area but the accounts testify to the impact the pioneers have made, often in only a short period, on the progress of the Plan. It is hoped that the stories will vividly remind the friends of the words of the House of Justice in its 2007 call for pioneers: “Let those souls able to join their co-workers in the forefront of activity hesitate not a moment longer.”

* * * * *

Philippines

Two young men, aged 18 and 20, who have arisen twice as short-term homefront pioneers, have exemplified the truth that carrying out activities within the framework for action builds capacity and strengthens love for Bahá’u’lláh. After capably serving as pioneers in the **Santo Tomás** cluster that has an intensive program of growth, they were asked by the cluster agencies to move to the sleepy cluster of **Magpet**, which had a small number of believers who had completed Ruhi Institute Book 1 but otherwise had very little Bahá’í activity.

These two devoted youth quickly brought a new spirit to their second pioneer post. They began four junior youth classes, established study circles, and rapidly moved a handful of the local believers through the sequence. When several of the local friends reached Book 3, the pioneers assisted them to establish children’s classes. Ten families were inspired to host regular

devotional gatherings, which attracted about 70 people. Those studying Book 2 carried out home visits accompanied by the pioneers. All of this activity was undertaken with the loving and constant support of the regional Bahá'í agencies as well as the Auxiliary Board members, who exchanged frequent text messages with the pioneers to convey guidance and encouragement and to assist them in evaluating the progress of the area.

Although not yet old enough to serve on a Local Spiritual Assembly, the young pioneers were able to help the Assembly host Nineteen Day Feasts on a more regular basis and one Holy Day celebration. These spiritual gatherings, which have attracted up to 40 people of all ages, have helped to revive and galvanize the members of the community. Looking back on these achievements, one of the pioneers commented:

Some friends would say that this [community] is like a soul awakening and uplifting owing to its “highly charged spiritual atmosphere.” All are deeply moved by the chanted prayers and Words of God that are recited. Some friends would share how these words touched their inmost being and how they could apply the Teachings in their daily lives and in their participation in the Bahá'í community. We rejoice with much gladness to share this spiritual food prepared for us by the Blessed Beauty.

The greatest gift these two consecrated believers have given to their new community is the vision of the Five Year Plan. They have taken every opportunity since their arrival at their post to enlighten the local friends about the nature of an intensive program of growth and how their cluster can attain that stage of community development. Through discussions on spiritual topics initiated by the pioneers, the friends in the cluster now recognize the need to proceed through the higher books to become animators and tutors.

The pioneers have already promoted and established systematic three-month cycles of activity in line with the Plan. Their own excitement about the process of growth has become infectious, so now others are motivated to prepare themselves to participate in the upcoming teaching campaigns that will lead to the launching of a program of growth. Only a few months after settling at their post, the two young pioneers recounted that they cannot possibly express what a blessing it has been to witness firsthand the spiritual resurgence of their adopted community through their “reliance on the divine assistance and confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh.”

Colombia

Cluster number 6 in the Sucre region is situated in an area that had received waves of attention from the Faith as far back as the 1970s and had proven to be receptive. But the potential of the area had not been exploited because of the difficulty in trying to raise up human resources; therefore, over time the work of the Faith had languished in the cluster.

At the beginning of 2007, the agencies of the Faith in the region carefully surveyed the cluster and chose two communities to focus on. One of the towns, Chinú, was quickly revived through the efforts of an Auxiliary Board member, assisted by another believer. Working as a team, these two made visits to the town to facilitate a large, very successful Book 1 study circle. Two homefront pioneers, both trained and devoted believers, were dispatched to the second town to work full-time at raising up that Bahá'í community.

The second town, Sampués, already had two families proceeding through the sequence of courses. They had reached Book 4. The pioneers began their work by centering their efforts on those families and their children, relatives, neighbors, and friends. New study circles were established and within a year seven people had completed the sequence and almost all of these were actively engaged in the core activities.

From the beginning, the cluster agencies closely monitored the work in the two towns and ensured that the pioneers, visitors, and active local believers had the resources they needed, especially institute books and materials. A budget was set and funds made available. Evaluation of the progress of the cluster was ongoing, including weekly consultations. By the midpoint of 2007, the area was progressing but lacked clear focus and intensity. Therefore, systematic teaching campaigns were instituted, taking advantage of the sizable number of seekers already generated by the core activities. This last element—the spirit of teaching—gave the cluster the boost needed to generate enthusiasm among all the believers, including the pioneers. It gave new life to the study circles in the higher books even as it led to the establishment of additional ones. Within just over a year, there were 24 believers who had completed the sequence, a solid base on which to launch an intensive program of growth.

In evaluating this successful approach to moving a cluster to higher stages of development, it was noted that this was possible because of what had already been learned by advanced clusters in other parts of the country. Applying these insights made it possible to raise up this area in a relatively short period of time through careful planning and the placement of pioneers who were then well supported in their work.

Cambodia

The Cambodian community is poised to achieve its goal of launching intensive programs of growth in all of its clusters by the end of the Five Year Plan. One of its most potent instruments for attaining this ambitious goal has been the strategic deployment of homefront pioneers. The community has accumulated years of experience with homefront pioneers and consequently has been able to refine its approach to utilizing them based on action and reflection.

Initially, general appeals were made for believers to arise to homefront pioneer, but now pioneers are carefully selected before placing them in goal clusters. The agencies and institutions seek out individuals who have shown that they have the vision of the Plan, are resourceful and willing to take initiative, and have previously demonstrated that they are willing to serve selflessly.

The **Pursat** cluster has been developed as a learning site for homefront pioneers, so all prospective pioneers before proceeding to their posts receive training there to supplement what they have already learned through the institute courses. If potential pioneers have relatives in any virgin areas of the country, they are placed in those areas and initially take up residence with family members. If not, they visit possible posts in the company of an Auxiliary Board member to search for a receptive population. Experience has shown that the most receptive groups in Cambodia are junior youth, youth, and public school teachers, so pioneers are often settled near a school.

These trained pioneers are not only able to initiate and sustain core activities, they are capable of making and implementing plans. They have learned how to reach out to parents to explain how the Faith can benefit their sons and daughters. They know how to visit their neighbors and engage them in meaningful conversations. They are able to give their new friends a vision of how their community can be uplifted through the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. While they provide the stable base for community growth, they do not labor alone. The agencies of the Faith ensure that the pioneers are supported by teaching teams that visit from other communities to assist with outreach and teaching. This systematic deployment of trained human resources results in the establishment of the Faith on a solid foundation in unopened areas and rapid progress in other developing clusters. It is a key strategy for victory in the Plan.

Other Examples of the Effective Use of Pioneers

Turkey: A homefront pioneer to the priority cluster of **Amasya** began her work by forming study circles with less active Bahá'ís. She also focused her efforts on a seeker who had recently been widowed and was searching for spiritual answers. Through her love and patient teaching, the man became a believer. She continued to work with and accompany this new believer through Book 1. More importantly, she involved him in a teaching campaign in another village where he experienced the sweetness of teaching for the first time by leading, with the assistance of the pioneer, a young man to accept Bahá'u'lláh. One observer commented that “to be able to see this newly born spiritual brother trying to stand on his own feet was beautiful.”

Ethiopia: Eight short-term pioneers, after a two-week training program, settled in the priority clusters of **Adama**, **Badawacho**, and **Debre Zeit**. They have been able to conduct institute campaigns and study circles, and have accompanied the local friends in carrying out core activities and collective teaching endeavors. The Counsellor reported that the pioneers are orienting young believers to the framework of the Plan and are “instilling in the youth a new vigor in serving the Faith.”

United States: When one low-income area in the **San Diego, California** cluster became the focus of a direct teaching campaign, two young believers selflessly arose as homefront pioneers and moved there to serve as anchors for that neighborhood. It did not take long for their homes to become the center of the activities for what is rapidly becoming a “Bahá'í village.” The believers and others in that neighborhood were moved that these friends had changed their residences in order to be with them and to help them to grow spiritually. The pioneers make their homes available for activities, including private prayer, even at times they are not home. Their presence in the neighborhood has increased the frequency of core activities and made it possible to interact with new believers and seekers in a more natural way as part of daily life.